

## **Certifying Ballot Printers In California**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

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Under California law, any company wanting to provide ballots to California cities or counties for use in any election conducted in the state must first be certified by the Secretary of State.

Following is a list of answers to some frequently asked questions about the ballot certification process.

**Q: Where can I find the laws that govern the printing of California ballots?**

A: California Elections Code section 13004 requires the Secretary of State to adopt regulations that spell out how ballots are manufactured, distributed, and how inventory control is maintained. The law also requires the Secretary of State to certify each ballot manufacturer before the manufacturer can begin selling ballots to California counties. The regulations detailing the requirements ballot printers must comply with can be found in the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 2, Sections 20200-20267. To view the regulations, [click here](#).

**Q: What is a ballot manufacturer?**

A: CCR Section 20207 defines a ballot manufacturer as a “Secretary of State certified vendor which processes card stock to make sheets or unfinished ballot cards, or to make ballot cards by a continuous process involving a single machine, to be used in California elections.”

**Q: What is a ballot finisher?**

A: CCR Section 20205 defines a ballot finisher as “Secretary of State certified vendor which processes sheets or unfinished ballot cards to make ballot cards to be used in California elections.”

**Q: Where can I find a list of the certified vendors?**

A: The list of state certified vendors can be found on the Secretary of State website at <http://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/pdfs/approved-vendors-2017-01.pdf>. This list is updated by January 1 of each year and within ten days of any changes that are made to the list as prescribed in CCR 20226.

**Q: How does a printing facility become certified to print ballots that can be used in California elections?**

A: There are three major steps a printing facility must complete before it can become certified to print ballots that can be used in state and local elections.

1. A completed application must be submitted to the Secretary of State's office. The application can be found on the Secretary of State website at <http://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/pdfs/approved-vendors-2017-01.pdf>. The completed application must detail how the printing facility will comply with the laws governing ballot printing, a detailed security plan, and examples of the printing facility's activity report, warehouse inventory control record and shipping report. The information required on an activity report, warehouse inventory control record and shipping report can be found in CCR, sections 20245, 20247, and 20259, respectively. To view the regulations, [click here](#).
2. To ensure the ballots printed by the printing facility requesting certification meet voting system specifications, test ballots must be printed and submitted to each voting system vendor for testing. Once the voting system vendor determines the ballots are acceptable, the voting system vendor will notify the Secretary of State in writing that the ballots meet specifications.
3. When the Secretary of State has received a completed application and the required notification from the voting system vendor, Secretary of State staff will conduct an onsite inspection of the printing facility.

Upon successful completion of these three steps, the ballot printing facility will be certified.

**Q: How long does the certification process take?**

A: The length of the certification process varies depending primarily on how quickly an applicant completes the application process. Once the Secretary of State receives the confirmation letter from the voting system vendor and has a completed application in hand, the process could take as little as one month. However, if the application is incomplete and multiple revisions are required, the process can take significantly longer. The same is true if the inspection reveals deficiencies with the printing facility and additional inspections are required.

**Q: When can a facility print ballots?**

A: Prior to printing ballots, a certified ballot-printing vendor must obtain a ballot release number from the Secretary of State's office. The release number represents authorization by the Secretary of State to manufacture a specific number of ballot cards for a user or send unfinished ballots cards for finishing. The ballot

release number request form includes the number of ballots requested for a specific tint, format, and party. This form can be found on the Secretary of State's website at <http://votingsystems.cdn.sos.ca.gov/cert-and-approval/ballots/ballot-release.pdf>. The release numbers are also used by Secretary of State staff to monitor ballot shipments between printers and counties.

**Q: How are ballots secured at the print facility?**

A: If the certified ballot printing vendor plans to store printed ballots at its facility beyond the day of printing, the facility is required to place the ballots in a locked, secure storage facility that relies on a uniquely-serialized, tamper-evident seal. Any authorized employee who enters the secured storage area must make a signed entry on the access log and the warehouse inventory control record. If an employee finds the numbered seal is broken, or the number is not what it should be, the certified print vendor must conduct a manual inventory of the ballots against the warehouse inventory control record and notify the Secretary of State's office.

**Q: What does the shipping process of ballots entail?**

A: Within seven days after ballots are finished and ready for shipment, pursuant to CCR Section 20259, the printing facility is required to submit an activity report to the Secretary of State. The activity report must include the quantity printed, date shipped, and the addressee. Each package is required to be wrapped in waterproof paper and labeled with the sheet size, tint, number of reams, direction of grain, purchase order number, date of shipment and factory order number. Upon receipt of the ballots, the county is required to conduct an inventory of the shipment independently of the ballot printer and report it to the Secretary of State. This enables the Secretary of State to monitor the movement of ballots and serves as an efficient auditing tool.

**Q: How long is the certification valid?**

A: Once a ballot printing facility is certified, it is permitted to print ballots until the certification is revoked. The Secretary of State is required to make biennial inspections of each certified ballot printing facility. If, during the inspection, it is determined that the printing facility is not adhering to California law, certification to print ballots will be revoked. The Secretary of State reserves the right to conduct these inspections with or without prior notice and may conduct additional inspections if required.